

Election of Committee

The Committee was then nominated as follows :—

British Isles.—Mr. A. J. Shepherd, L.C.C., Dr. Forsyth, Rev. W. B. Selbie, M.A., and Dr. A. W. Russell.

United States.—Mr. W. R. Patton, Hon. R. H. Hays, Dr. P. S. Moxom, Dr. L. H. Hallock.

Australia.—Rev. Jas. Buchan, M.A., Rev. J. W. Jones.

Canada.—Mr. C. Cushing, Rev. Hugh Pedley, B.A.

The Chairman at this point invited Dr. Alex. Whyte to a seat on the platform, which he took amidst applause.

The first address was given by the Rev. Peter Taylor Forsyth, M.A., B.D., principal of Hackney College, London, who took as his subject, "Forgiveness through Atonement the Essential of Evangelical Christianity." Before commencing his address, Dr. Forsyth led the Council in prayer.

ADDRESS BY REV. PETER TAYLOR FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.

FORGIVENESS THROUGH ATONEMENT THE ESSENTIAL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

One of the acutest problems of the church at this moment is that raised by the pressure of the critical method upon the New Testament. It is not only to apply to the New Testament the criticism which has been so fruitful with the Old Testament. That is intricate enough, and much more intricate for the New Testament than for the Old Testament. But the problem is more than intricate. It is profound and spiritual. It comes nearer than Old Testament problems do to the centre of the soul, the word of conscience, the essence of faith, and our eternal hope. It is to apply criticism to the New Testament, regardless of the fact that we have there what we do not have in the Old Testament. We have everything clustering round a historic personality, with whom the soul is in direct and living communion to-day, and a final and eternal act of God as the consummation of that personality—an act which fundamentally altered the whole moral relation of the race to Him. We have to do in the New Testament with the person of Christ and with the cross of Christ. And in the last issue with the cross of Christ because it is the one key to his person.

In approaching this subject let us be clear about our starting point. In our modern psychology we start from the primacy of the will, and we bring everything to the test of man's practical and ethical life. And so, here also we start ethically from the holiness of God as the supreme interest in the Christian revelation. The standpoint taken throughout is that which I believe to be the position of the New Testament. That book represents a grand holiness movement ; but it is one which is more concerned with God's holiness than ours, and lets ours grow of itself by dwelling on his. Christianity is concerned with God's holiness before all else ; which issues to man as love, acts upon sin as grace, and exercises grace through judgment. The idea of God's

holiness is inseparable from the idea of judgment as the mode by which grace goes into action. And by judgment is meant not merely the self-judgment which holy grace and love stir in man, but the acceptance by Christ of God's judgment on man's behalf and its conversion in him to our blessing by faith.

By the atonement, therefore, is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness, has it for its first charge and finds man's reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is divinely satisfied once for all on the cross. Such an atonement is the key to the incarnation. We must take that view of Christ which does most justice to the holiness of God.

So viewed the atonement is central :—

- i. To the New Testament Gospel (Harnack);
- ii. To the leading features of modern thought;
- iii. To Christian experience.

I shall reserve ii. for treatment elsewhere as being perhaps less suitable for an occasion like the present.

And by centrality is meant something far more than that the doctrine is the pivot of an adjusted and balanced system of thought, something much more vital and effective for moral life and the life of the soul. By centrality is meant finality for human history and destiny. It is meant that when Jesus died for our sins he died once for all, that he did not merely signalise in a classic way the expiation all must see, and illustrate and cheer every man's atonement for his own misdeeds. It is meant beyond that, first, that in the atonement we have primarily the act of God, and the act of God's holiness; second, that it alone makes any repentance or expiation of ours satisfactory to God; and third, that as regards man it is a revolutionary act, and not merely a stage in his evolution. It is further meant that our view of what Christ was and did, must be the view that does most justice to the holiness of God and takes most profoundly and seriously the hallowing of his name.

A true grasp of the atonement, not only meets many positive features of the present age, but above all it meets the age in its need and impotence, its need of a centre, of an authority, of a creative source, a guiding line, and a final goal. It goes with our best positive tendencies and it meets our negative need, our lack of a fixed point. All around us is in a growing flux; change is everywhere; and it may or may not be development according as our fixed standard and goal may be. With no centre, either for its own action or for our estimate, it means disintegration. And especially does our religion need a moral centre. It grows on the one hand evolutionary, and therefore inevitably unearnest; and on the other hand sentimental. It harps on love till it reaches the condition of those decently demoralised people who read nothing but the literature of love, dwell on nothing else, slacken every moral fibre by the submission to this of every other interest in life, and finally gravitate to a chief interest in its morbid or immoral forms. Fraternity grows at the cost of fidelity, the democratic sympathies and pities monopolise the moral world, the moral type changes, another scale of virtues fills the ideal. "Among the working class," says Miss Loane from a long experience as district nurse, "generosity ranks before justice, sympathy before truth, love before chastity, a pliant and

obliging disposition before a rigidly honest one. In brief," she continues, "the less admixture of intellect required for the practice of any virtue the higher it stands in the popular estimation." But what does that mean but the retreat of the protestant type of life before the Roman, of the evangelical virtues before the catholic, of heroic faith before humanist, of Paul before Pelagius. It means the removal of authority from a positive centre in Christ's redeeming act to what I might call a diffused centre in the church, from a new moral man once for all in the cross to the man periodically renewed in kindly sacraments. What is lacking to current and weak religion is the very element supplied in the atoning cross as the reconciling judgment of the world.

That is the general theme which I would enlarge.

I

In regard to Christ's cross, and within the New Testament, we are to-day face to face with a new situation. We are called upon, sometimes in the tones of a religious war, to set Jesus against Paul and to choose. We are bidden release him from Paul's arrest, to raise him from that tomb in which he was buried by the apostle of the resurrection, and loose him and let him go. The issue comes to a crisis in the interpretation of the death of Christ. To treat that death as more than a martyrdom, or to allow it more than a supreme degree of the moral effect upon us of all self-sacrifice, is called a gratuitous piece of theology. To treat it as anything more than the seal of Jesus's own faith in the love of God, or in his prophetic message of reconciliation is to sophisticate. To regard it as more than the closing incident in a life whose chief value lies in its history (which all the time criticism slowly dissolves), is a piece of perverse religious ingenuity much like the doctrine of Transubstantiation. To regard it as having anything to do with God's judgment on man's sin, or as being the ground of forgiveness, is a piece of grim Judaism or gloomy Paulinism. The death of Jesus had no more to do with sin than the life of Jesus; and Jesus in his life made no such fuss about sin as Christianity has done. The death of Jesus had really no more to do with the conditions of forgiveness than one of Fox's martyrs. Every man must make his own atonement; and Jesus did the same, only on a scale corresponding to the undeniable greatness of his personality, and impressive accordingly.

Such teaching removes Christ from the Godhead of grace and makes him but the chief means of grace. It is not ours. In my humble judgment it is quite foreign to Congregationalism, and incompatible with it. For a Congregational church is not a band of disciples or inquirers, but a community of believers, confessors, and regenerates in Christ's cross. Congregationalism, as an evangelical body, has stood, and stands, not only for the supreme value of Christ's death, but for its prime value as atonement to a holy God, and as the only atonement whereby man is just with God. The atonement which raises that death above the greatest martyrdom, or the greatest witness of God's love, is for us no piece of Paulinism.

Of course, we have all felt the reticence of the Gospels on that doctrine. But how can we avoid feeling its real presence in them except by coming to them with a dogmatic humanism, or a heckling criticism, or a conscience mainly æsthetic. Why one of the most

advanced New Testament scholars in America is, I believe, at work on a book to prove that the main interest of St. Mark is not biographical, but dogmatic on such matters as baptism and atonement. The Gospels stand at least on the atoning deed, they were written for a church created by it, and they give singular space to it. Even in John, Jesus is not a disguised God urging people to pierce his veil; he is there to do a work that only his death could do, as a corn of wheat must die to bear. And the Epistles are full of the meaning of that deed.

And where did their interpretation of its meaning come from? From Paul's rabbinism? From the Judaism of his upbringing? From the fanciful speculations of his environment? Was it an interpretation or an importation? Well, where does Paul himself say he got the atoning conception of Christ's death? He received it from the Lord? What does that mean? Was it really but some flash of insight peculiar to his own genius or his idiosyncrasy. Was it a feat of ingenious interpretation? No doubt it took, in certain lights, the colour of his rabbinic mind, but was it in essence just an original and daring application of Judaic theology to the crucifixion? Was it a brilliant construction whose flash he mistook for a special revelation? No, in its substance it was a part of the Christian instruction which completed his conversion at Damascus. It was from his teachers that he had the atoning interpretation of Christ's death. He delivered to his churches what he received among the fundamentals (*ἐν πρώτοις*) from earlier Christians, that Christ died for our sins, that his blood was shed for their remission, that his death set up a new relation or covenant between God and man, and that all Israel's history and Bible meant this. In the year 57, that is, he states that such was the common faith of the apostolic community when he was converted, three or four years after Christ's death. It was nothing he developed or edited, but it was something which came from Jesus himself. Paul received it from the Lord because it came to him from those who had so received it at first.

And how came the apostolic circle to have this view of Christ's death? Could they have foisted on the cross an interpretation so audacious? Must they not have been taught by Christ so to view it, in such words as are echoed in the ransom passage and at the Last Supper? We have the same idea, with natural enough variants, in Peter, in John, and in Hebrews. No; the first teacher of the atonement was the Christ who made it. It is no Paulinism, except in certain side lights. Had the apostles held the humanist view that what mattered was but the life, character and teaching of Christ, would they have given the hand of fellowship to Paul when he came to them with the view that these mattered little compared with Christ's death? Would Paul have taken their hand, with that gulf between them. And what a gulf! It is at bottom all the gulf between the Judaism which killed Christ as Beelzebub and the Christianity which found in his death his deity. The whole history of the church shows that there can be no standing unity of faith or spirit between those to whom Christ's death is but a great martyrdom and those to whom it is the one atonement of the world and God, the one final treatment of sin, and the one compendious work of grace.

We have been warned against the idea that Christ taught about himself or his work as an essential element of his own Gospel. We are told that he is detachable from his Gospel, if not in history yet in principle. We received it through him, to be sure, but we do not

necessarily have it in him. But let us leave the question whether he taught himself, and go back to the prior question. Is the Gospel, is Christianity, primarily what Jesus taught? Is that the whole Gospel? Is it the focus of it? Or the standard? Is the Gospel confined to the Galilean ministry? Are we to test every teaching of an apostle by what is left us of the teaching of the Master—either by that alone or by that in chief? Where in the New Testament do we find the authority for that limitation. Where does Jesus impose it? It is surely clear that those he taught never understood him so. If they had, could they have done anything else than go about retailing that teaching, with a lament at its premature arrest? But is that what they did? The prime thing, and the earliest thing, we know about their teaching (I have just said) is that Christ crowned Israel by dying for our sins. It has not the note of regret, nor the note of transmitted precept. When precepts were wanted they made new ones for the occasion, on the free evangelical principle, and not on the canonist. They applied the redemption to particular junctures freely, in the spirit; they did not make a casuistic application of Christ's maxims. They did not attack Jew or Gentile even with the parables. James himself, who might have been expected to abjure the Pauline method, and take the strictly ethical line, does not draw his precepts from the armoury of synoptic injunction, or treat Christ as the Chief Rabbi of Israel. Nay, they did not even work with the mere personal impression made on them by Jesus, with the magnetism of a personality whose acts or whose words another Rabbi might criticise. They worked with his person as itself the message, and the final message, with a faith which was not a piece of impressionism but the worship of their new creator, which therefore did not fade as an impression does, but grew as a new life. Whether Christ taught himself or not, what he gave, what he left behind, was himself above all; and himself as no mere impressionist but as the Saviour, the New Creator. His legacy was neither a truth nor a collection of them, nor a character and its imaginative memory, but a faith that could not stop short of giving him the worship reserved by all the past for God alone. And what did this? It was the cross, when it came home by the resurrection through the Spirit. It was then that Jesus became the matter and not merely the master of gospel preaching, then that he became Christ indeed, then when he became perfected! Perfected! He became the finished Saviour only in the finished salvation. And, for those who worshipped him first, all he was to them centred in the cross and radiated from there. It was he who was made sin for them in the cross that became for them God reconciling the world to himself. He was all to them in the cross, where he died for their sin, and took away the guilt of the world, according to their Scriptures. It was then that he finished the universal task latent in their national religion, and dealt once for all before God with the sin of the world. That was the starting point of the Gospel; that made it missionary, made the church; and it is the content of the Gospel. And it is always to there that the church must come back, to take its bearings, and be given its course.

The very silence of Christ makes his atonement the holiest place of Christian faith. But it was not absolute silence. It was reserve. And he broke it in Paul. The exposition in the Epistles is the Saviour's own work upon his work. He becomes his own divine scholiast. If he lived in Paul submerging Paul (Gal. ii. 20) then Paul's word here

LOCAL OFFICIALS



REV. J. M. HODGSON, D.Sc., D.D.,
Edinburgh.
(Chairman of the Local Executive Committee.)



REV. HENRY PARNABY, M.A.,
Edinburgh.
(Convener of the Hospitality Committee.)



REV. ALFRED GARDNER,
Dundee.
(Chairman of the Congregational Union of Scotland.)

was a continuation of Christ's work. It is Christ giving that account of himself which in the Gospels was restrained, partly for want of an audience that could understand or a disciple that could apprehend. His silence is not so surprising. If he showed himself after his resurrection only to the disciples, if he refused to make it a miraculous appeal to the sceptical world, so, in the still holier matter of his cross, he may well have been reserved, even to his own. The great doers are greatly dumb. And Christ was straitened in the doing of the mighty work. But his church—it is no wonder that his church has been prompt to praise it, keen to pierce, and eager to construe it. For the church is the organ which cannot but speak and praise when the Master's silent touch on the keys sets free its soul.

It is sometimes said that the great question of the hour for the church's belief is Christological; it is the question of Christ's person. That is true. But it is the question of the cross all the same. For the question of the Christ is the question of the Saviour. It is not a metaphysical question, but a religious. It is not philosophical, but experimental. It is theological chiefly as being ethical—as turning on sinful man's practical relation to the ethic of eternity, which is the conscience of a Holy God. The question of Christ is not the question of a divine hypostasis, but of a divine Saviour. Technically spoken, the Christology turns on a soterology.

But the question of a Saviour is the question of a salvation. It turns not only on an experience, and the experience of a historic person, but upon what is for us a *revolutionary* experience and not a mere impression, however deep. The soterology turns on a soteriology. The centre of Christ is where the centre of our salvation is. He is Christ, he is God, to us in that he saves us. And he is Christ by that in him which saves us. He is Christ and Lord by his cross. Christian faith is our life-experience of complete and final forgiveness in Christ. It does not *include* forgiveness; It *is* forgiveness. Its centre is the centre of forgiveness. Only the redeemed church, the church that knows the forgiveness, has the key to the Saviour. His blessings are the key to his nature; they do not wait till the nature is first defined. No philosopher, as such, has the key, no theologian, no scholar, no critic; only the believer, only the true church. And we have it where the evangelical experience has always found its forgiveness—in the cross. Our faith begins with the historic Christ. But not with the biography of Christ (except for propædæutic purposes). We begin, in principle if not in method, with Christ the crucified. Not with a writer's picture of Christ the prophet but with the work of Christ the Saviour, continuous in the church it made, and made the mother of our own soul. Mere historic knowledge can create no salvation; which is not given by certainty about a historic fact, nor by any intelligent grasp of it, but by faith in it, in that within it which is superhistoric. And faith finds in this fact of the cross worlds more than a prophet's martyrdom. It finds the depth of God, and not merely the depth of the martyr's convictions. The Christ that we trust all to is not one who died to witness for God, but one in whom God died for his own witness, and his own work on us. God was in Christ reconciling. The prime doer in Christ's cross was God. Christ was God reconciling. He was God doing the very best for man, and not man doing his very best before God. The former is evangelical Christianity, the latter is humanist Christianity. Christ's history, his person, can only be understood by his work, and by a work

we apprehend in our moral experience even when we cannot comprehend it by our intelligence. We believe with the unity of our person much that we cannot yet reduce to logical unity. And our soul, our self, finds itself in him long before our mind does—just as, in the case of his own life, he but gradually appropriated and realised by experience the content of his own personality. The Christ we worship is Christ as forgiver, as redeemer, new creator, and judge of all. His relation to the God of thought is something we can wait for; it is a question of the metaphysic, or the theosophy, of Christian faith and ethic. But the church's belief in the divinity of Christ is the result of her experience of justifying faith, of being restored and raised into the communion of God by union with His Christ in faith. To be united with Christ is, in our experience, to be united with God. Therefore, Christ is God. I am redeemed in Christ, and only God can redeem.

Our chief legacy from the past is distance and alienation from God. The chief problem of the present (and of every present) is to reduce and destroy that. It is reconciliation. But reconciliation is no æsthetic, or educational, or impressionist affair. It is not a revival. It is not a question of moving a certain number of individuals, and gathering them for salvation out of a lost mankind. It cannot be done by a magnetic temperament, a noble character, or a lofty sage. It means changing a race's relation to God. We have to be redeemed into that reconciliation, and redeemed as a race. It is a work that has to be done, and not merely a personal influence that has to be conveyed. Christ did not die simply to affect men but to effect salvation, not simply to move man's heart but to accomplish God's will. It is all the following up of a great and final deed—the cross.

It is the cross, then, that is the key to Christ. None but a Christ essentially divine could do what the church beyond all other knowledge knows the cross to have done for its soul. The divinity of Christ is what the church was driven to to explain the effect on it of the cross, the new creation, so much deeper than any impression on us, and calling for an author so much more than prophetic in soul. The atonement of the cross is the key that opens the door, but the house we enter is not made with hands. It is the very heart of God. We are not landed in a vestibule but straight in the sanctuary of the place. This Son of God is God the Son.

II

In the life of Dr. Dale it is mentioned that in his closing years he was much impressed with the remark of a friend that it was high time the word grace returned to our preaching. He felt that it had been ousted by the word love, in our vehement reaction from theological orthodoxy. And he knew that any gospel of love which was not dominated by the idea of grace had but a short and feckless life before it.

Now, though the idea of grace has returned to our preaching, it has not returned to an extent that would have satisfied Dr. Dale. And one reason for that is that the attention of the Christian public in the interval has been deflected. It has been deflected towards social sympathies, at the cost of personal experimental and I will say ethical religion. At the cost of ethical religion, I will say. For we have lost the sense of sin, which is the relation of the conscience to the conscience of God. And apart from sin grace has little meaning. The

decay of the sense of sin measures our loss of that central Christian idea; and it is a loss which has only to go on to extinguish Christianity.

It is reported from most quarters in England that there is a serious decline in church membership. For this several explanations are given. But it is well to face the situation, and to avoid extenuation. And if we do, we should admit to ourselves frankly that the real cause is the decay, not in religious interests or sympathies, but in personal religion of a positive and experienced kind, and often in the pulpit. Religious sympathies or energies are not Christian faith. Faith is Christian certainty. We have become familiar with the statement (so welcome to easy religion) that there is as good Christianity outside the churches as in. This is not quite false, but it is more false than true. It would be true enough if Christianity meant decent living, nice ways, precious kindness, business honour, ardent philanthropy, and public righteousness. But all these fine and worthy things are quite compatible with the absence of personal faith as Christ claims it, in the sense of personal experience of God in Jesus Christ, personal repentance, and personal peace in Christ as our eternal life. Yet that is God's first charge on us. And it is the kind of Christianity which alone makes for a church and its membership. A Christianity merely ethical, refined, or sympathetic certainly makes for the social state, if you can keep it up; but the Christianity that makes for the church is of a much more intimate, personal, and positive kind. And its absence must not only diminish the roll of membership but reduce interest in the great religious issue between church and state. The reports that come in are as clear about the cooling of that interest as they are about the drop in the membership of the churches. My diagnosis is that both are due to a decay of membership in Christ. Our social preoccupation has entailed real damage to personal and family religion. For even among those who remain in active membership of our churches the type of religion has changed. The sense of sin can hardly be appealed to by the preacher now, and to preach grace is in many even orthodox quarters regarded as theological obsession, and the wrong language for the hour, while justification by faith is practically obsolete. Well, it may be wise not to preach about grace, but it is fatal if that is because we do not have it, instead of because we reserve it, if the reason be of truth and not of its economy.

I know what is said in reply, and it is said with much force. It is said that the sense of sin has not departed but has only changed its form. We are more dull to individual sin because we are more alive to social sin. We have public compunction instead of personal repentance.

To that remark I would answer two things.

First. Public compunction does not move to seek forgiveness, which is the prime righteousness of the Kingdom of God, but to pursue redress and reform. And redress and reform is not what makes Christianity. Christianity is a religion of redemption, but that is a religion of amelioration or assuagement. It is engrossed with the wrong done to our brother and not to our God, and it is therefore to that extent the less religious.

But second. The tendency is welcome in so far as this, that we cannot stop there. The more public it makes the sin, the more social and racial, so much the more does it drive us upon a treatment of sin which is ethical and not temperamental, racial as well as personal, and

not only racial but divine. Now there is no treatment of it which satisfies these demands of the soul, the conscience, society, and God, but the atonement in Christ's cross. In the old juridical theories the social, or racial, aspect of the atonement, its connexion with the moral order, is one of the great truths. And the more these theories become unsatisfactory on other grounds the more should their social sense of sin be developed in terms of modern society. But then the more sin is socialised so much the more imperative becomes the necessity of an atonement. As man grows the sin grows, our sin becomes unified, organised, and must therefore be dealt with at a centre. The social organism has a common and organic sin. And a collective sin must have a central treatment. The more I lament and amend social wrongs the more I must realise before God the responsibility for them of me and mine. It is not only the Plutocrats. If it is man that is wronged it is man that has wronged him, it is man that has sinned, man that is condemned. You cannot split up the race. You insist, indeed, on its solidarity. Its unity and solidarity is one of the common-places of modern thought. So, if sin there be, man is the sinner. Surely, therefore, the wrong inflicted on man sets up a corresponding responsibility on man at his centre; and it makes any atonement a matter of judgment, and not mere repentance or reparation. That seems inevitable if we believe in responsibility, and also believe in the unity of the human race. It seems logical.

But there is much more than logic in it. It comes home far more mightily and solemnly from the belief in another unity, the belief in the absolute moral unity of God, in a word, a real belief and a real sense of his holiness.

To bring sin home, and to bring grace home, we need that something else should come home which alone gives meaning to both—the holy. The grace of God cannot return to our preaching, or to our faith till we recover what has almost clean gone from our general, familiar, and current religion—I mean a due sense of the holiness of God. It has much gone from our public worship, with its frequent irreverence; from our sentimental piety, to which an ethical piety with its implicates is simply obscure; from our public morals, to which the invasion of property is more dreadful than the damnation of men. If our Gospel be obscure it is obscure to them in whom the slack God of the period has blinded their minds, and hidden the Holy One who inhabits eternity. This holiness of God is the real foundation of religion—it is certainly the ruling interest of the Christian religion. In front of all our prayer or work stands "Hallowed be Thy name." If we take the Lord's Prayer alone, God's holiness is the interest which all the rest of it serves. Neither love, grace, faith, nor sin have any but a passing meaning except as they rest on the holiness of God, except as they arise from it, and return to it, except as they satisfy it, show it forth, set it up, and secure it everywhere and for ever. Love is but its outgoing; sin is but its defiance; grace is but its action on sin; the cross is but its victory; faith is but its worship. The preacher preaches to the divinest purpose only when his lips are touched with the red coal from the altar of the thrice holy in the innermost place. We must rise beyond social righteousness and universal justice to the holiness of an infinite God. What we on earth call righteousness among men, the saints in heaven call holiness in the eternal God.

Have our churches lost that seal? Are we producing reform, social or theological, faster than we are producing faith? Then we are

putting all our religious capital into the extension of our business, and carrying nothing to reserve or insurance. We are mortgaging and starving the future. We are not seeking first the Kingdom of God and his holiness, but only carrying on, with very expensive and noisy machinery, a "kingdom-of-God-industry." We are merely running the kingdom, and we are running it without the cross—with the cross perhaps on our sign, but not in our centre. We have the old trade mark, but what does that matter in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, if the artesian well on our premises is going dry?

To bring *sin* home, and *grace* home, then, the *Holy* must be brought home. But that again can be done, on the scale of the church and the world, only by replacing the *cross* at the centre of Christian faith and life, as an atonement to this holy love. The centrality of the cross belongs to it only as an atoning cross. Only if Christ atoned for the world did he culminate in the cross, and do the great thing there. And it is as an atonement that the Church has kept the cross at its spiritual centre. This is still the moral problem of the church in relation to society. The form, indeed, of the church's moral problem will always depend on the social conditions of the hour; but the substance of it is always the same. It is practical. It is to place the moral centre of society upon the moral centre of the soul, upon the centre of the moral universe. And what is that but to place the conscience of society on Calvary. What is our problem to-day? It is to take the mass of men (and not only the masses)—inert and hopeless some, others indifferent, others hostile to God—and to reconcile them with God's holy will and righteous kingdom, to reconcile them not with the *ideal* of a kingdom of God, but with his *way* of it. It is to destroy our national and social dislike of that new enthusiasm, to supplant lust by a higher ardour, to bend the strongest wills to the obedience of the holiest, and by moral regeneration, to restore men both physically and socially. This is a tremendous task. It is the grand object of history. It is far beyond socialism. And no laws can do it, and no change of circumstances, but only Jesus Christ. It is the fruit of his work, of his holy love, his holy spirit, and his holy church, all flowing from his holy cross. And the more we are preoccupied with social righteousness so much the more we are driven to that centre where the whole righteousness of God and man found consummation, and adjustment, and a principle and a career, in the saving judgment of Christ's cross. The cross alone gives moral freedom, and moral independence to the mass of men, who were left to slavery by the heroic moral aristocracy of stoicism. It is the cross that makes moral worth an infectious power, and keeps character from being self-contained, and gives a moral guarantee of a social future. The cross is the spring, not of self-possession and individualist righteousness, but of that creative and contagious goodness which makes possible the social state. Only at the centre of the cross does the man find himself in his kind, and both in God. A creative, missionary, and social ethic springs only from religion: and it springs most from the religion which is able to clothe us with the power of the creative, loving, outgoing God.

III

When we speak of the centrality of the Atonement, I have said, we mean much more, worlds more, than its place in a religious system.

This is no congress of scientific theologians, but an assembly of faith and a communion of saints. And we are speaking of that which is the centre, not of thought, but of life, conscience, history and destiny. We speak of what is the life-power of the moral world and its historic crisis, the ground of the church's existence, and the sole meaning of Christ himself. Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there. And all that man's moral soul needs doing for it was done centrally there. Neither cross nor Christ is simply a historic fact by which we order our mental calendar; they make the sun in our heaven, the force in our world. They make our vital centre, not as mere facts, but as sacraments, not for their occurrence, but for their significance; not because we reckon from them, but because we live from them.

It is sometimes said, "There are several theories of the Atonement, but we have to do with the fact, and not with our understanding of it." This frame of mind is the root of all that is most feeble and ominous in our churches to-day. The one thing we need is to understand the Atonement, with a life's understanding, with a vital conscience. There it is that Christ comes to himself for good. There, as it were, he finds his tongue, and takes command of the deep eloquence of moral things. Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross. Nor have you measured the moral world. Such a fact as Christ or his Atonement only exists as it is intelligible, as it comes home to us with a moral meaning and a moral nature. It is only by understanding it that it becomes anything else than a martyrdom, that it becomes the saving act of God. It is only by understanding it that we escape from religion with no mind and religion which is all mind, from pietism with its lack of judgment, and from rationalism with its lack of everything else.

If I may be pardoned for another reference to Dr. Dale, he said that one of our great needs was more preaching about Christian ethics. Well, since his time that need has been largely met, especially in the region of social ethics. Perhaps, indeed, it has been overdone, considering the amount of insight into ethical principle which we mostly have at command. We have been made to attend to the Christian life, in the sense of Christian conduct, at the expense of the Christian life in the inner sense of justifying faith. Ethic has been externalized. The effect of faith in conduct has been ethicized, but the nature of faith in experience has not; it has been sentimentalized. The centre of gravity has been transferred from the cross to the parable of the prodigal. So that what we need is the ethicizing of religion itself, and not simply of the fruits of religion. We want a religion ethical in itself, in its nature, genius and effect; we want more than a manner of life which is morality suffused with piety. And to ethicize religion we must restore to it, from its centre, that note of judgment which it has lost, that note of supreme reference to a holy God. The moralizing of Christian conduct is not the moralizing of Christian faith. But it is the faith that needs moralizing most. If conduct is wrong, it is the religion that needs reforming; the life will follow the faith. And to reform our religion we must be driven, not only *to* its centre but *into* its centre. You seek the ethicizing of religion, its rescue from theology and sentiment? Well, you can only get it by theology. The prime need of religion to-day is a theology. No religion can survive which does not

know where it is. And current religion does not know where it is, and it hates to be made to ask.

The ethicizing principle of religion must be the creative element in its source. Has it a moral source? To answer that question is theology; and it is a theology of judgment. Ours is an eternal faith, and it can only be moralized by the eternal righteousness, *i.e.* by its source in a holy God. The source of an eternal faith can only moralize that faith if there be established at its centre with might what reigns in the universe by right—the moral majesty, the holiness of God. That is theology; but it is also essential Christianity.

Yet so far have we got from this supreme concern of Christ, that when the effort is made to give it its true place for his work on earth, some minds, demoralized by their very religion, cry out against theology, and metaphysics, and academics. It is a cry charged with the ruin of the Christian future. There is nothing that need surprise us in the failure, the ebb, of any church which treats the holiness of God as a piece of theology, and its centrality to the conscience as a piece of metaphysic. What is the worth to the Christian gospel of a piety which calls the theology of holiness academic. Protest as you like against the language of pure thought, and the inaccessibility to relative man of the unconditioned absolute in the ethic of pure thought. Protest strongly against making salvation depend on assent to the metaphysics of Trinity. But when we have come to be so saturated with the religious impressionism of the hour that an ultimate concern of heart, soul and mind with the holiness of God is a strange tongue to us, and its satisfaction a mere piece of theology, then the kid is seethed in its mother's milk, and the soul sodden with the very religion that should be its food. Of course most men, even religious men, are unfamiliar with the holiness of God, but the unfamiliar is not the academic.

We are paying bitterly now, and we shall pay more bitterly yet, in the bewilderment of our youth, for that neglect by the church to educate its ministry in its own subject at the plastic time, which makes such talk possible. When preachers denounce theology, or a church despises it for literary or social charm, that is to sell the cross to be a pendant at the neck of the handsome world. It is spiritual poverty and baldness, it is not the simplicity in Christ, to be sick of grace, judgment, atonement, and redemption. The holiness of God has become a spent force if a gospel which turns entirely upon it is called metaphysical or academic.

IV

Be not ashamed of the cross of Christ, for there alone the final and public righteousness of God is revealed to our growing faith. A moral order of the world is our one modern certainty, among those who are certain of anything. And if, as we Christians believe, this moral order reflects the nature of a holy God (without exhausting his being) then the supreme interest of the world lies there. That interest is the first charge on an ethical religion. All the bearings of a faith like Christianity therefore must be taken from there, and from wherever that is supremely revealed. Christianity is only true if it deal with this, and it is only final if it come to final terms with it. The cross of Christ has more than a passing place only if it give final effect to this holy thing, and is understood in relation to it. It has no meaning as an incident, none except as it is understood; none as a piece of history, only as it is superhistoric. It is presented to our

conscience, and not to our sympathies or tastes. It is not an impressive spectacle, but a decisive act, with the moral order of God's holiness for its central issue and first charge. The understanding of this is the one thing needful for the internal troubles of our religion to-day. An enlightened Judaism can preach a gospel of forgiveness, but our Christian religion has primarily to do with the terms of forgiveness; not with God's readiness to forgive, but with his way of redemption; not with his willingness, but with his will; and with his will not merely as his aim, but as his deed; not as intended, but as achieved. The feeble gospel preaches "God is ready to forgive"; the mighty gospel preaches "God has redeemed." It works not with forgiveness alone, which would be mere futile amnesty, but with forgiveness in a moral way, with holy forgiveness, a forgiveness which not only restores the soul, but restores it in the only final and eternal way, by restoring in the same act the infinite moral order, and reconstructing mankind from the foundation of a moral revolution. God reconciles by making Christ to be sin, and not imputing it (2 Cor. v, 21). The Christian act of forgiveness at once regards the whole wide moral order of things, and goes deep to the springs of the human will for repentance and a new order of obedience. This it does by the consummation of God's *judgment* in the central act of mercy. Do not think of God's judgment as an arbitrary infliction, but as the necessary reaction in a holy God. There alone do you have the *divine* necessity of the cross in a sinful world—the moral necessity of judgment. A judgment upon man alone would have destroyed him. And a judgment borne by God alone would be *manqué*, it would be wide of the mark, as being irrelevant to man's experience and regeneration. But borne by God in man, in such a racial, nay cosmic, experience as the cross of Christ, it is the creation of a new conscience, and of the new ethic of the race. When Christ died, all died. Dying with Christ is not a mere ethical idea, complete only as we succeed in doing it. It is a religious or mystic idea, which is ethical, as taking effect in a holy act, where it is already complete in principle. It is not applying the principle of salvation to life, it is the foregone salvation which becomes our life; and practical Christianity is living it out, and not merely squaring life to it. The judgment involved is one that fell on Christ once for all. It is not a judgment in individual men, but in man in Christ. It is not the sum total of our self-judgments under Christ's light; rather say, all our self-judgment is but inspired by the complete judgment on Christ once for all. It is on us as we are in him, yet not as judgment but as grace; not as punishment, but as salvation; not as a scourge, but as a cross.

Without such a cross and its Atonement we come to a religion of much point and no atmosphere, much sympathy and no imagination, much kindness and no greatness, much charm and no force—a religion for the well-disposed and not for the rebel, which loves our neighbour, but not our enemy, and not our Judge; a religion for the sensitive, but not for the world. When the world-cross goes out of the centre of religion, religion in due time goes out of the centre of man's moral and public energy. The public goes past the preacher because he is not strong enough to arrest and compel them. He has too much to say and too little to tell. He hangs to his age by its weakness, and not by its strength. He does not reach its soul with such gospel as he has. The pathos of Christ takes the place of his power. We canonize the weak things of our Christian world in our haste for rapid

success with the many. Religion becomes too æsthetic, too exclusively sympathetic, too bland, too naturalist. Our very Christmas becomes the festival of babyhood, Good Friday the worship of grief, and Easter of spring. To use the old theological language, under an obsession by culture and its pensive delicacies, we become dominated by the passive obedience of Christ instead of his active. We treat the cross as a passion only, instead of a principle, or as a principle instead of a deed. Christ becomes a pathetic, tender, helpful and gracious figure rather than a mighty. We prefer the flavour of the evening service to that of the morning. The religion that is driven out of business and our energetic hours takes refuge in our tired hours and our evening time. And it takes on that hue. It acquires that type—even in the preachers too often, whose active business it should be. We tend to overprize the subdued, composed, and vespertinal type of religion, whose patron saints are outside the evangelical succession with Francis and Fra Angelico; or we are engrossed with the genial, brotherly, and bustling type. And all the time the church is dropping into a vague Arianism: it is losing faith in the incarnation, faith in the real presence of the redeeming God, and therefore faith in a strenuous and historic ethic. Is it wonderful that it should be deploring a decline which it cannot stay by all its religious galvanism and its forced enterprises? The idea we are offered is a kingdom of man, with God to serve it, rather than a kingdom of God, with man to serve it. It is a consecration of the natural man *by* God instead of his redemption *to* God. It trusts to man's Christian culture instead of his conversion. The God within exploits the God without. The historic facts of our faith become not so much unique organs of God's self-revelation, as they are means of making us aware of the God within us, and living up to him. We do not so much owe our soul to the fact of Christ, we impose on that fact the soul within us, the human soul, crude, but still very capable; dim, but unlost; and so we really receive but what we give. Revelation is then not an objective authority, given at a point once for all; it is but a subjective way of treating history. The course of history is the real revelation. The deification of a point in it, of a person in it, is only a passing mythology, forced on us by a psychological necessity, though it may be very valuable when properly guarded. But Jesus cannot be regarded as an objective revelation. He lives while we believe.

The tendency to dwell upon the passive obedience of Christ is but the theological way of expressing the tendency to dwell on God's sympathy and to ignore his salvation. There is little doubt that the sympathetic tendency is the more popular to-day, and to press salvation in a real sense is to be accused of a reactionary bias to theology. But a God who is merely or mainly sympathetic is not the Christian God. The Father of an infinite benediction is not the Father of an infinite grace. We are often warned of the dangers of anthropomorphism, especially by those who are preoccupied with the superpersonal element in God (though it is better described as intrapersonal). But what we need much more to-day is a caution against anthropopathism, or a conception of God which thinks of him chiefly as the divine consummation of all our human pity and tenderness to man's mischance, bewilderment, sorrow and sin. A being of infinite sympathy would not rise to the height of the Christian God. And a religion of far more sympathy than we have yet felt would not be the Christian religion. It is needless to dwell on the preciousness of sympathy. The man who needs none is something less than human; and the man who receives

none remains so. But a sympathy which has no help mocks us with an enlargement of our own sensitive impotence, which means so much better than it can. And a sympathy which could only help would not secure us against the fear that all its help might be at last in vain. It might not reach me, or not my worst need; or it might be arrested by a power more mighty to foil than to help. We must have a sympathy that can not only help but save, save to the uttermost, and not only bless but redeem. Nay, far more, we must have, for the entire confidence of faith, a sympathy that *has* redeemed, and already triumphs in a conclusive salvation. If God, indeed, could not sympathise, he would be less than God. There would be a region, large or small, into which he could not pass. There would be an insuperable obstacle set to Almighty God by a something which by so far reduced his power and resisted his access. He would be a limited being, tied up, as impersonal things are, by their own nature, and incapable of passing beyond it. But all the same, if God were all sympathy, if his divine power lay chiefly in his ability to infuse himself with superhuman intimacy of feeling into the most unspeakable tangles and crises of human life, then also he would be less than God, and we should have no more than what might be called a monism of heart. Even a loving God is really God not because he loves, but because he has power to subdue all things to the holiness of his love, and even sin itself to his love as redeeming grace. A sympathetic God is really God because he is a holy, saving, redeeming God; because in him already the great world-transaction is done, and the kingdom of his holy love already set up on his foregone conquest of all evil. The great and crucial thing is done *in* God and not *before* him, in his will and not in his presence, *by* him and not *for* him by any servants, not even by a son. It is an act of his own being, a victory in his own immutable and invincible being. And to be saved, in any non-egoistical sense of the word, means that God gains his own victory over again in me, and that I have lost in life's great issue unless he do. God's participation in man's affairs is much more than that of a fellow-sufferer on a divine scale, whose love can rise to a painless sympathy with pain. He not only perfectly understands our case and our problem, but he has solved it. The solution is for ever present with him. Already he sees, and for ever sees, the travail of his soul and is *satisfied*. All the jars, collisions, contradictions, crises, pities, tragedies and terrors of life are in him for ever adjusted in a peace which is not resigned and quietist, but triumphant and exultant; and nothing can pluck us from his hands. All history, through his great act at its moral centre, is, in God, resolved into the harmonies of a foregone and final conquest. And our faith is not merely that God is with us, nor that one day he will clear all things up and triumph; but that for him all things are already triumphant, clear and sure. All things are working together for good, as good is in the cross of Christ and its saving effect. Our faith is not that one day we shall solve the riddles of providence, and see all things put under us, but that now we see Jesus; and that we commit ourselves to one who has both the solution of every tragic thing and the glory of every dark thing clear and sure in a kingdom that cannot be moved and, therefore alone, moves for ever on.

Our current religion of sympathy is but a section, and not the central or effectual section, of a religion which is a religion of redemption; and of achieved redemption, else it must at last cease to be a religion at all. That, and only that, is the fulness of the evangelical gospel.

But in all the subjectivism I have named are we not slowly passing to another religion, a religion which starts with man's spiritual nature and not with God's self-revelation, with humanity and not with history, where man becomes "his own Holy Ghost." We are bidden to study human nature, not the Bible, not Jesus Christ except to look for classic cases of spiritual humanity and high prophetism. The Bible becomes then but a valuable deposit of that irrepressible spiritual energy in man which in every age takes its own form, and finds no kind of finality in any age. That, of course, reduces Jesus to a mere historic link instead of a perennial presence, and his cross to one of the crises we have surmounted, or are in process of doing so. The greatest personality is but a node in the great evolution. Man needs but evolution and not revolution. He only needs that his face be cleared, and not turned steadfastly to Jerusalem.

Let us see exactly where the point is, and let us be quite fair to the kind of liberal religion in view. It does not, of course, exclude God. It does not say that the religious development of man is a smooth or an automatic thing. Progress still needs the help of God, or whatever stands for God. It needs even the act of God. The origin of faith within man is an act of God. But the point is that this act is not a revolution in man, not a new creation, not a regeneration, not an absolute redemption but only a release, an impulse from God, the elimination of our best, a delivery of the innate spirituality and goodness of man with which history is in travail until now. It is not a salvation from death but only from scanty life. There is no real critical life and death catastrophe in the moral history of the race, but what we have is a deep consistent progress, harmonious on the whole, each step attaching to the step before. We have the happy perfecting of those decent, just, or tender instincts which are the original righteousness of human nature, the gradual surmounting by moral culture of sense and self. God is our helper and no more. He is not in a real sense, but only a figurative sense, our Redeemer. He helps us to realise our latent spiritual resources and ends. There is no break with self and the world, only a disengagement from an embarrassing situation.

It should be clear that this is another religion from that of redemption, and it has no room or need for atonement. And if it be true, then Christianity is not so necessary as we were led to think. Its whole complexion is changed. Nothing so very serious has taken place. Things can be bad enough, but not so bad as all that. Human nature is very mysterious but there is nothing marvellous, miraculous, in God's relation to it, nothing that needs much penetration or agony of holy thought. Incarnation becomes a metaphor. These greatest words are so great and useful because they can be made to mean anything. Well, faith in the incarnation is bound to become a metaphor, and to sink, if we count it mere theology to take it seriously that God was in Christ reconciling the world, and to press on to understand the mighty God hallowed in the atoning cross. It is bound to sink so as to become the incarnation of man instead of God, if in the cross we see but the extreme suffering of the most loving man instead of the supreme act and victory of the most holy God. If Christianity do not make a revolution in human nature we make a revolution in Christianity. A religion centring wholly in the graciousness of Christ, or his submission, or his spiritual insight can be no foundation for a commanding ethic or a triumphant faith.

He lacks the virile note. It did not come as a grand spiritual personality, but as the Redeemer. It was not to spiritualise us but to save us. Moral verve is bound to relax if the religion of the cross become but a hallowed addition to life's spiritual interests or touching moods, if it do not carry the stamp of moral crisis and personal decision for death or life. Ethic is bound to grow less strenuous, even while we bustle about ethical conduct, if the sublime ethical issue of the universe is not the marrow of our personal divinity and the principle of our personal religion. We can find a strong foundation only in that centre where the holy God both bears our load and performs his new creative act. If in the cross we have but the greatest of love's renunciations instead of the one establishment of God's holy will, then the sense of God's presence in the cross, and in the church, and in the world's moral war, is bound to fade. The eternal ruling God cannot be God in a passive or touching cross merely. A religion of mere service is no religion to rule; such a world as this. We shall come to feel that in the cross there is no God, but only a victory of God's foes, another and a tremendous case of the world crushing the good and just, another case of the soul's defeat by fate. Then, of course, Christianity must die. "The cross is either the life of our religion, or it is the death of all religion. Either it is the supreme atonement and so the final guarantee of God's Fatherhood and its victory, or else it is a mere martyr death, and so an eclipse of that fatherhood, its greatest historic eclipse, which would mean its extinction." Christ trusted a God who did not give him the victory. A pathetic, mystic, and martyred Messiah could stir the sympathy of many, but could not win the worship of the world. He could impress but not forgive; he could move men but not redeem them; he could criticise society but not judge the world. A king the world could just crucify is no king the world could fear; it needs a king who in his cross judged the world, and did not simply find his fate there. There is nothing central, nothing creative for life in such a fate. There may be much in it to appeal to our sympathetic and religious side, but nothing to establish faith, nothing to ethicise it from a creative centre, nothing to fortify us against the unholy, nothing to set conscience and holiness on the throne of the world. If Christ died to saving and central purpose, then he died by the act of God. His death was God's act in the sense that it was the moral activity of God. God was in Christ and his death, acting there, setting up an everlasting kingdom, and not simply inflicting, nor simply suffering, a racial penalty.

Moreover, a pathetic cross sends our active sympathies mainly to Christ's teaching and his miracles. If we see in Christ and his cross chiefly the passive and the affecting side, and not the active and creative side, if we see Christ's love enduring judgment more than God's holiness triumphant in judgment and doing there the grand, nay, the one, moral act of the world, if we see but that, no wonder the vigorous world turns away from the cross to the teaching of Christ and his beneficence. For these *are* acts of will, positive deeds with active effect. It is no wonder a cross of pathetic and appealing suffering, a cross of mere sacrifice, should become decentralised in favour of these. And yet these have no permanent value for us in themselves, but only as expressions of Christ's person. The great thing is not that they were said or done, but said or done *by him*. And the person of Christ would be dumb and inert for us in

our last crisis, apart from its active assertion and cosmic triumph on the cross. The cross, therefore, was no martyr passivity of the finest prophet, led like a lamb to the slaughter; it was the work of a Messiah king with power over himself. Christ never merely accepted his fate; he willed it. He went to death as a king. It was the supreme exercise of his royal self-disposal. The same great picture which presents the sheep before the shearers dumb deepens before its close to one who poured out his soul unto death. And when we obscure that, when we pity where we should worship, melt where we should kneel, or kneel where we should rise to newness of life, it is no wonder if faith become a mere affection, or a mere ethical ritual, and cease to be the absolute committal of ourselves to him for ever. It is no wonder, then, if it cease to be the practical and eternal consignment of our spirit into his hands who has redeemed us as our Lord God of Truth. Faith is really self-disposal. But currently it is not. It is any of a multitude of things but not that, except in some feeble or breezy sense which does not save the moral asthenia of the church. The church has lost much moral tone even in its occupation with ethical subjects. It has lost power to guide the instinct of self-sacrifice by reducing the cross to nothing else. It has lost religious weight in the weightiest matters. And the deep cause is its modern failure to understand the cross, to see in the judgment of the cross God's righteousness, God's holiness, coming to its own, and to realise this as the one object for which man exists or the world. This failure is bound to tell acting on the scale of a church, however secure many fine souls may feel, living in a coterie and painting angels in their solitary cells.

It is only as God's act then that Christ's death can retain or regain a central place in faith. Second it is only as an act revolutionary for man. And farther, it is only as an act in which his holiness gives the law to his love, and judgment make grace precious. Holiness must be the first charge on the Saviour. If we spoke less about God's love, and more about his holiness, more about his judgment, we should say much more when we did speak of his love. And we should keep that supreme in our faith which was supreme in Christ's, in that saving hour when the sense of love was dimmed, when communion failed, and nothing was left but faith by which to save the world.

And it is round this sanctuary that the great camp is set and the great battle really waged. Questions about immanence may concern philosophers. And questions about miracles may agitate physicists. But the great dividing issue for the soul is neither the Bethlehem cradle nor the empty grave, nor the Bible, nor the social question. For the church at least (however it be with individuals) it is the question of a redeeming atonement. It is here that the evangelical issue lies. It is here, and not upon the nativity, that we part company with the Unitarians. It is here that the unsure may test their crypto-unitarianism. I would unchurch none. I would but clear the issue for the honest conscience. It is this that determines whether a man is Unitarian or Evangelical, and it is this that should guide his conscience as to his ecclesiastical associations. Only if he hold that in the atoning cross of Christ the world was redeemed by holy God once for all, that there, and only there, sin was judged and broken, that there and only there the race was reconciled and has its access to the face and grace of God—only then has he the genius and

the plerophory of the Gospel. If he hold to Christ as this head, then, whatever views he may hold on other heads, he is of the Gospel company and the Evangelical pale. Only thus has he a real final message for the age. Only thus is he more than one that has a lovely voice and can play well on an instrument for the ages' pleasure—and its final neglect.

v

There are two sets of admissions that should be made here. One concerns the history of the doctrine, the other concerns its place in individual experience.

(1)

As to the doctrine in history, we ought to admit the value of much of the socinian and rationalist criticism of it. The value is negative and corrective, but it is value. The ecclesiastical form of the doctrine is the source of most of the prejudice against it. And I mean particularly the forms it took among the Protestant scholastics of the 17th century. Many of these forms will not bear the light of Scripture any more than of reason. They are more aristotelian than apostolic. I do not say they depart from the New Testament doctrine, because it would be hard in the present position of New Testament knowledge to say the New Testament had a complete doctrine. But it has a principle and a norm which is positive enough to enable us to rule out many notions which misrepresent God's grace. For instance, we can no longer treat the atonement as a deflection of God's anger, as if the flash fell on Christ and was conducted by him to the ground, while we stood in passive safety, with no part or lot in the incomprehensible process. We can no longer speak of a strife of attributes in God the Father, justice set against mercy, and judgment against grace, till an adjustment was effected by the Son. There can be no talk of any mollification of God, or any inducement whatever, offered by either man or some third party, to procure grace. Procured grace is a contradiction in terms. The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace. What was offered, was offered by God, within the Godhead's unity. The Redeemer was God's gift. Farther we must not think that the value of the atonement lies in any equivalent suffering. Indeed, it does not lie in the suffering at all, but in the obedience, the holiness.*

And it is both a moral and a psychological impossibility that an amount of suffering equivalent to what we deserved should ever have been undergone by Christ or any personality in our stead. Again, we must speak very differently about the transfer of guilt, and never as if it were a ledger amount which could be shifted about by divine finance, or a ponderable load lifted to another back. We have to be cautious in using the word penalty in connection with what fell on Christ. We must renounce the idea that he was punished by the God who was ever well pleased with his beloved Son. The chastisement of our peace was upon him indeed; but if we think there is no chastisement left for us in him, we have against that idea the whole classic Christian experience, which finds the truest, deepest, and bitterest repentance at the end of the Christian life rather than at the beginning. But it is one of our present misfortunes that so much criticism of the popular doctrine,

* I have developed this in the *Expositor* for September, 1908.

with its abuse of repentance, is conducted by people who seem not to know what bitter repentance, spiritual brokenness and total humiliation mean. I would rather repent truly with a Salvationist theology than criticise that theology with a judicial superiority which needs no repentance.

(2)

But in respect of personal experience, do we deny all true faith which does not grasp the atoning cross? Surely not; so long as it is not denied or denounced; and so long as the experience of particular individuals is not made the measure of the message of the Church.

I hope I take due account of the effect of Christ's person, word, and deed before the cross. I have often recalled Zaccheus, the Magdalen, Peter, and, I may add, Judas. And to-day still the life, the words, the acts, the death of Christ have a precious power to rouse men, to break, heal, and restore them to him, without direct reference to his atoning work. The saving action of Christ for many individuals begins there—in his life; especially to-day, and it only attains late unto the resurrection from the dead. We do ill to force the ripe experience of the cross on those who can as yet feel but its dawn. Any theology of atonement must be adjusted to the indubitable fact that Christ's forgiveness may and does reach personal cases apart from conscious reliance on his atoning work or grasp of its theology. To do otherwise would be to show ourselves the victims of a pedantic dogmatism or a theological papacy. To preach Christ is indeed fundamentally to preach his atonement, but it is not incessantly to preach about it. We must always preach it, but we need not always preach about it. Only it must not be denied or denounced, never ignored or levelled down to the category of man's efforts to atone his own sins. It is true there are stages and junctures when to preach Christ in the more theological form is the only preaching relevant to the mental and moral situation. It was so at the Reformation. But to-day it may be more needful in certain positions to preach the Christ of the cross than the cross of Christ. There is a strategy in the holy war. It is the crisis that calls the reserves to the front. But whether we preach the Christ who atoned or the atonement of Christ it is still an atoning Christ and an atoning cross we preach. To preach only the atonement, the death apart from the life, or only the person of Christ, the life apart from the death, or only the teaching of Christ, his words apart from his life, may be all equally one-sided, and extreme to falsity. I will only stop to remark here that the more the conscience is affected by Christ's words or behaviour, the more is that standard generated within us which demands the atonement in the cross. It was the Christ of the cross that said these words, and did these things. It was the Christ who himself was driven by his experience to recognise that the crowning thing he came for was to die. And another remark must be made. What we are chiefly concerned with is the great message and experience of the church; and that cannot be whittled down to the experience of individuals and their early stages. It is a minimal gospel that is paralysing the cross. Preach the total Christ therefore in the perspective of evangelical faith, but with immediate stress on that aspect most required by the conscience of the hour. For the Reformation age the ethical concern may have been satisfaction and its true form; for our age, with another public ethic, it may be judgment as the demand of a social

righteousness. For that age the interest was far more directly theological and juristic, now it is more psychological and ethical. Then it was the Christ of the two natures cohering in one person that gave value to the cross, now the stress is the Christ of the one, holy, obedient personality. The unity we prize in the Saviour is not one realized previous to the cross metaphysically, so much as a unity by and in the cross as the crowning moral act both of God and of humanity in Christ. But a point of unity we must seek if our faith is to be unified, if life is to be unified out of its present distraction, if religion is to have a vital core and cease to be a frame of pious moods or morals. Our relation to God must be a real one and not subjective. It must turn on a positive fact and act, which gives it both reality and unity; and on a fact of history. It is not enough to say this fact is the person of Christ. If his be not a mere loose-hung personality with a religious casualism it must itself have a principle of unity. This principle cannot, with our data, be psychological; even with more data perhaps it would still be beyond our comprehension psychologically. "Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst, nicht mir." But it is a theological unity converging on his death and the consummation thereof of all that made his person what it was, took him out of the category of other men, and made the ground of our salvation. He saved us by his difference from us. He did not redeem us because he represented us; rather he represents us because he redeemed. Had he redeemed man by representing him, man would be self-redeemed. It is the atoning death of Christ as the representative of God that makes Jesus a complete and closed personality with a final action on the world. He died once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to his finality of God.

VI

But after these admissions let me lay the more stress on the necessity of this atonement for that maturer Christian experience which gives us the true type of faith.

The conscience has many functions, and the atonement of Christ satisfies or stirs them all. It strikes light from many angles, and it is presented in the New Testament in various complementary ways. But its chief action on the conscience is to pacify its accusations with the love and grace of God. Faith is above all the life of a conscience. It is the life of a conscience which is stilled and established by the forgiveness of God. True enough, as I have said, this may take a true, though an incipient form, in the deep impression made by the tender mercy of the kindly Christ. But many never rise above this level. It is enough for them to respond to Christ's gracious way with the sinners he met. They place themselves among the sinners he forgave and healed during his life. And they may question the need of any atonement. The assurance from Christ of God's forgiveness is enough. But that is a very naive and all too simple faith for such a conscience as ours, and such a world. Let its value for certain individuals not be denied. Who would be exacting with the simple souls? But surely it condemns them to be perpetual moral minors. And it keeps faith at the lay level. Ours is a lay faith, but the Christian could not live on it at lay level. If such people go on to think and ask, as they should for their soul's life, in passing from

disciples to regenerate, must they not begin to have certain misgivings? Must they not, for instance, say to themselves at some time: "Those cases that Jesus forgave were but single cases; is mine quite parallel? If he forgave them must he forgive me? Is God's forgiveness just a series of acts, one for each soul? If so how do I know where they may stop, whether they will reach to me? Or is his forgiveness one great act into which I am built, so that when one died all died?" Moreover, the soul goes on to think thus: "As I grow in Christ my sin grows on me, and the tremendous thing in my pardon grows on me. The damnability of sin grows on me and with it the incredibility of grace. How do I know not merely that God is willing to forgive but that he has forgiven, that what is so incredible is equally unalterable?" Still farther. The believer sins after he has been forgiven. "Am I fit," he says in his repentance, "to stand with those that Jesus forgave. They did not betray him. I have sinned against a light and an experience they never had. I am a chief of sinners. I have sinned my mercy." Moreover, there rises on his soul a deepened sense of Christ's demand. His forgiving words to special cases lose force compared with the exigence of his general demand and the holiness of his standard. His judgment grows more serious than it seemed in our first forgiveness. How shall we stand? Better people than we he left outside his kingdom. And so we oscillate between the goodness and the severity of God. We are tossed from the one to the other. They alternate as it were according to our mood, they are not entwined and fused. They thwart each other, and get in each other's way; they do not sustain each other. And the conscience gets no rest till it find in the cross the one final fact in which both are reconciled and inwoven, with the grace uppermost. I meet the atonement where the sin of the whole world is taken away, which carries in it the foregone forgiveness of sins I dread and yet am sure I shall do. There are various ways in which a man finds it hard to take home the forgiveness he craves by a general declaration of God's love. Some may not feel so much the greatness of their sin as the incredibility of anything so vast as God's love. There may not be grievous blots on their life, yet they feel that the state of the world's conscience must call out God's judgment on the race, including them. On the other hand if there be such blots in life, and especially if a man sins after his forgiveness in a grievous way, he gets such a shock in the revelation of sin's tough and subtle power that it needs something very final and decisive to assure him of its destruction. He must then have a grace which is not simple and self-evident—for "lightly come, lightly go." He must have a finished work, and a God who has made a full end. A conscience in his state, as soon as it thinks on a world scale, must have a grace and salvation which is not benignant only, but gathers up the total moral situation in one act, which settles the great strife for good and all. He must have more than a full forgiveness, he must have a complete redemption. And that means one which pursues, captures, and subdues to God's holy purpose those consequences of our sin which have long gone beyond our control or knowledge, and are out on the world doing evil work at compound interest on their own account. He needs something to make him confident that his past sin, and the sin he is yet sure to commit, are all taken up into God's redemption, and the great transaction of his moral life is done. The real complete forgiveness is the appropriation of the world's atonement.

It is not easy. For a man to make Christ's atonement the sole centre of his moral life, or of his hope for the race, is not easy. Nothing is so resented by the natural self as the hearty admission of man's native lostness and helplessness, especially when he thinks of all the heroisms, integrities and charities which ennoble the race. It is not always pride, it is a mere natural self-affirmation. It is a native self-respect, which makes him shrink from submitting himself absolutely to the judgment of another. Even in his repentance he does not want to lose all self-respect. He feels he cannot amend the life of conscience, and repair the old faults, without some remnant of self-respect to work from. His new shoots must come from the old stump, which must not be rooted out. He is fighting for the one remnant of a moral nature which if he lost he fears he would be less than a man. He does not easily realise what a poor thing his self-justification must be compared with his justification by God. He does not feel how sterile the stump is, how poorly his moral remnant would serve him for his moral need, how recuperative vitality is the one thing he lacks, how absolute God's grace is, and how complete is the moral re-creation in Christ. He palters with a synergism which is always trying to do the best for human nature in a bargain with God. And he does not realize how this starves and pinches the conscience itself, compared with the moral fulness of a total gift of grace and a new man in Jesus Christ. There are thus a thousand influences of no ignoble kind which may arrest a man's total committal of himself and his kind to the new creation in Christ's cross. And it seems a reasonable self-respect which solicits him to reserve a plot of land in his interior where his house is his castle and he can call his soul his own, even at the challenge of the holy and all-searching Judge. He does not, perhaps, venture to say that God and the soul are coequal foci in the moral ellipse, but he struggles, sometimes pathetically, to set up what is as impossible morally as mathematically—a subsidiary centre; which is a contradiction in terms. There is but one centre, one Lord, one cross, one faith, and one spirit of a new life in Christ Jesus.

VII

It has been asked concerning Christ, Was his will to die one with his will to save? Is there any doubt about the answer the church has given to that question from first to last? The forgiveness, the redemption has always been attached to Christ's death, from New Testament days downward. Not indeed without challenge, especially in recent times, but the challenge has not affected the catholicity and continuity of the church's witness as a whole to that truth of its foundation. And the salvation is attached not to Christ's death as an incident of history or even as an object lesson of grace, but as the effectuation of grace, not indeed its procuring but its putting in action. It is not the fact of Christ's crucifixion that saves but the inner nature of that fact as understood, and not simply swallowed, by faith, understood as the atonement which makes reconciliation possible (2 Cor. v. 19-21). Such is the witness of you may say the whole church about its central relation to its creator, its living tenant, and perpetual Lord.

But this suggests a serious question. It is declared that, if we be true to the true Christ of the Gospels we shall relegate a final atonement in the cross to the region of apostolic theologoumena. That

means that Jesus did not understand his will to save to be one with his will to die. So that his death would be either an arrest of his saving work, or an indifferent sequel to it. It would be a mere anecdote of his life, not its denouement. And the serious question that then results is this, How came such a teacher, such a prophet, to be so deeply, so long, and so continuously misunderstood? If Christ's atoning death is not the central effect of his person, and the central thing to our faith, if that notion of atonement has overlaid Christ's real gospel, how has the whole church come totally to misread its creator, and to miss what for him *was* central. There has surely been some gigantic bungling on the church's part, some almost fatuous misconception of its Lord, a blunder whose long life and immense moral effect is unintelligible. An error of that kind is no misprint but a flaw. It is not mistake but heresy. And, as it concerns the centre and nature of faith, it must destroy any belief in the guidance of the church by the Holy Spirit—which, however, is not a very lively faith among those whose challenge concerns us.

But leaving that, I will keep the question upon lines which represent a less doctrinal interest. What a poor thing human nature must be to have been affected so mightily, nay in great measure revolutionised, by a mistake so complete. What a poor and untrustworthy thing human nature must be, to have found in such a moral blunder the charter of a new ethic, the foundation of a new humanity, and the secret of eternal life. The church has done its Lord many a wrong, but none so grave as this, to have determinedly perverted his legacy, and grieved his spirit in regard to the central object of his mission on earth. It has often travestied his methods, misconstrued points of his teaching, and even compromised his principles; but these things have been done against its best conscience and its holiest spirits. They have passed, and been reformed, and renounced. But this perversion I speak of is greater than these, less culpable possibly, but even greater as a perversion. For it has been the misrepresentation of Christ's central gospel by the church's best and wisest. It has been a more total and venerable perversion than even the papacy. For even had all such passing ills been cured this travesty of Christ's central intent would still have gone on, and gone on with all the force lent by a purified church, and all the spell of saintliness to wing the central lie. If the cross was but little to Christ in comparison with his real work, if it was a mere by-product of his mission, a mere appendix and not a purpose, and if his church has yet made it central and submersive of all else, then the enemies who swore Christ's life away did him no such bad turn as the disciples whose stupidity has belied him over the whole world for all time. And those browbeaters who would let him say nothing did his cause less harm than those apostles who made him say what he did not mean.*

*I would here anticipate a remark that may occur to some to the effect that I am allowing too much to the authority of the church, and that if the arguments I apply in respect of the nature of redemption were applied to polity we should be delivered into the hands of Rome and an episcopal succession. In reply I would point out that the church stands to the nature of its generative redemption in a relation quite different from that which it has to every other doctrine. It was the one thing that created the church, and therefore the church's verdict upon it has an authority quite interior to her views on all besides. We may take the constitution of the church, the ritual of the church, or its theological system at any stage; and not one of these has the same creative relation to the church as Christ's atoning death. We may even select from the system of the Catholic dogma the doctrine of the Incarnation; that truth, central as many find it, has no such centrality as the principle of atoning forgiveness. The doctrine of the Incarnation did not create the church; and the doctrine of the cross did—in so far as that can be said of any doctrine, and not

But we cannot stop here. There is worse to follow. What was Jesus about to leave such a blunder possible? What a *gauche* Saviour! What a clumsy teacher! How awkward a prophet! How unfinished with the work given him to do. Regard it. Suppose the central thing committed by the Father to Christ's charge was not the atoning task; suppose he himself was not central to his own Gospel, yet he departs and leaves a body of disciples who do believe his atonement to be the great work, and his person their God. And these have grown and spread into a Catholic church, which, amid many distractions and divisions, still founds upon this evangelical rock, and is the greatest product of humanity. Well, I say, if there be this central perversion of him by the body of his disciples and apostles, first and last, then and now, what are we to think of him? If he so discharged his real mission from God, and so gave his message during three years of public and responsible life, that a central misunderstanding swamped that message as he really meant it, and smothered his word in his cross, what kind of testimony was that he bore, and with what face would he return to him that sent him? If his cross cost him not only his life but his true message, and if his apostles of the cross have been among the most active obscurantists of his real kingdom, surely when he consented to death he signed away his commission, he consented too soon to die, and he accepted the one thing that foiled his true intent. The hour was not ripe when he thought it was that he should return to the Father. Never did he think his death would be captured, exaggerated, and exploited like that to obscure the Father and the kingdom. I say, if he left his disciples convinced that what was to him a side interest was his supreme bequest, and if the net result of his act all these ages has been to deepen and spread the mistake, then was he any fit trustee for the purpose of God? Observe this, too. The mistake is most deeply held and hallowed by those most near his own saintliness; its effect has been to generate that sanctity as nothing else has; it is only discovered to be a mistake late in history, by men who, however good, have more sense of what is rational than of what is holy. Well, noting this, can you suppress the question whether sainthood to Christ is good

rather of the act and power which the doctrine tries to state. The doctrine of the incarnation grew upon the church out of the experience of Atonement. The church was forced on the deity of Christ to account for its saved existence in Christ. We can experience the redemption as we cannot the incarnation. I have already said that the soteriology sprang from the soteriology—the creed of the person grew up in a church which had been created by the experience of his salvation. The authority of the church, therefore, in respect of the manner of its salvation is primary compared with its authority in regard to the constitution of its Saviour, far more in respect of its polity or its practice. Its testimony as to the cross is its witness to its own life. Here Loisy is right enough. There is a *continuum* in the church which takes precedence of every specific view the church may hold. It is the continuous, supernatural, eternal life. Only that life is not an indefinite vitality, without feature or content, and capable of almost any. But it is life as the new creation, carrying in its very heart its mark of origin, and having the seal of proceeding from the cross as the action of God's holy love on sinful man. My point then would be this. As the witness of an illiterate saint to God's grace in the redemption which has made him what he is has a value for the objective nature of that redemption that belongs to no other piece of his theology, so with the large testimony of the household of faith. Its witness to the divine act which called it into being and made it what it is, is on another footing from any matter of its polity or speculation. The church might have gone widely wrong on grave points like these without wrecking its own existence; but to have gone so widely wrong on the point I am treating would be for the church to commit suicide, to cease to be the thing that God once made, and practically to deny the Lord that bought it. For that there would be no repentance. The church of the papacy and the mass was reformable; but a church that renounced universally its atoning redemption would not be reformable. It would be extinct, however long it kept the name to live. All turns on the cross (i.e. the total person of Christ put into the cross) being the power creative of the church, and on the church's relation and witness to this source and secret of its life.

service to God? If, I say, the saints nearest to him have done most to decentralise in favour of the cross what was really dearest to him; if his greatest cloud of witness becloud his real word, and help but as the crowd helps at a fire; if those who know they are saved only in his blood are in effect one with those who were guilty of his blood in silencing his real testimony—what are we to think of him who so mismanaged things as to allow the blunder to be possible, who left his work in a condition that permanently spoiled it, and bequeathed to his best believers the doom of perverting the counsel of God?

Nay farther, if the effect of Christ has been that the church has worshipped a Redeemer on the cross when it should but have hearkened to God's prophet in his words, if it gave him worship where it owed him but attention, what must be the frame of mind in which he now lives and sees the misbirth that has come of the travail of his soul? If the church was left by him in such a state that it has gone on living on another centre than what was really his and God's, how shall we conceive the bitter regret with which he now views his old effort in the light of experience and of heaven. He who, we thought, had redeemed Israel botched the work, and left it to harden into a mere theology. And he who, we thought, ever lived to make intercession for us, must ever live in petition for himself, that God would graciously forgive the well-meant failure he must sadly own. If the effect of the church's evangelical faith upon Christ in heaven is to surprise and disappoint him by its central note, then, before the Father, he has to apologise for this diminution of *his* glory, he has to lament that the work was not put into better hands, and given to one without the genius of being misunderstood most by those who loved him best. And what before God he would have to confess for us, and deplore for himself, would be not only the diminution of God's glory but its unhappy eclipse by his own. He has been taken and made a king in spite of himself; and a king whose effect has been, not to hallow the Father's sole and suzerain name, but to obscure it by his own, to divide the worship and defect the work of God.

I trust these thoughts will not be deemed extravagant. They are efforts to think to the end, and to think with the foundation of faith, the intelligence of conscience, and the experience of life. They are not the exercises of an ideologue. They are efforts to recall our minds to the need for concentration, decision, finality, and footing; to call them in from dawdling and dabbling in eternal things; to protect them from the current susceptibility, discursiveness, and distraction; to guard them from a too mobile sympathy, which answers every novelty, joins every society, reads the latest thing, and sows itself on every wind; to secure them from a morbid vivacity which has a brisk interest in everything, and may even reach a curiosity about the Eternal; to shelter our minds from the humane optimisms in which the devil whispers that the devil is dead and the perfection of manly culture is at hand. I would force our concern on one vast world issue in which time is won or lost for eternity, and the whole human soul for the all holy God. We handle matters where to be right is to be right upon a final, sublime, and eternal scale. But to be wrong there is to fly from orbits of celestial range, and do damage at last to the inhabitants of heaven as well as the dwellers on earth. To be right here is to secure the church's future, to be wrong here is to doom it. But for the church to be right here is for the church continually to cry "Holy, Holy, Holy, O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us thy salvation."